

## The Wild Bunch

Robert Ralston

*Eager to work and determined to achieve, Robert Ralston and "The Wild Bunch" even hopped fences to fulfill the Laboratory's mission.*

**W**e were the "Wild Bunch," not because we were uncontrolled, but because we were wild to get things done. Many of us were fresh from college after being delayed by World War II. Memories of service during wartime, the Manhattan Project, and a nation coming together to fight a war were still vivid. The Korean War was entering its third year. With the Soviet Union bent on spreading its ideology, a sense of urgency pervaded our work. Underlying all those motivations was the excitement of scientists doing science.

As one of the original group working at the Livermore site before it was officially opened, I recall that the atmosphere before and after the Lab's official start in September 1952 was one of complete informality. There were fewer than 100 people, so we operated more like a family than a bureaucracy. Everyone knew each other: if something needed doing, you went directly to the person who could do it.

We were a can-do bunch, and when we had a schedule to meet, no red tape could stop our progress. When Johnny Foster, who later became Director of the Lab, wanted to get into a secured area and the guard was too slow coming to unlock the gate, Johnny simply climbed the fence.

Of course, not everyone could get away with such an act. Johnny was one of a kind. But everyone was special. We were all friends and had a sense of camaraderie, a clear mission, and a sense of urgency. The Cold War was heating up, and we had an important task to carry out. Competition with Los Alamos was also a driving force. Failures only served to increase the spirit of teamwork.

Since I retired in 1980, I'm always amazed when I visit the Lab now and see the few remaining wooden barracks buildings. But I see that some of the early spirit still flourishes, and I am proud to have been a part of this scientific community.

## Kids with a Plan

Bob Hughey

**I** was at the Lab as an Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) representative from its beginning in 1952. Our AEC office was established in 1951 to provide oversight of the contract with Standard Oil of California for the Materials Testing Accelerator (MTA) project at Livermore.

My first assignment was to provide technical oversight of the new work at Livermore. I was told there was a Livermore planning meeting at the Berkeley Lab and was given a building name and room number. I entered the designated room but quickly realized it was the wrong room, because five college kids were having a bull session. I told them I was looking for a Livermore planning meeting, and one of them said "This is it. Come on in!" The "kids" included Roger Batzel, Ken Street, and Barney Rubin.

**"Failures only served to increase the spirit of teamwork."**

## Shanghaied!

Herman Leider

In 1955 a close friend, who was in the Navy and assigned to Treasure Island, suggested that I take some vacation and see San Francisco and the surrounding area with him. I was working at a lab in Cleveland and had been considering a change to a better climate. So I decided to come west and applied to the University of California Radiation Laboratory (UCRL) in Berkeley.

I was invited to come for an interview in November and arrived at UCRL, only to be told that no positions were open. "But," the representative told me, "A car is waiting to take you to Livermore."

"Who or what is Livermore, and where is he or it?" I asked.

"Relax. You'll find out in an hour," he answered.

"But, but —."

"There, there, it'll be okay."

Shanghaied! Gus Dorough and Ken Street interviewed me in the back seat of Gus's 1954 De Soto in the west parking lot. They were all bundled up against the "cold," while I was stripping off my jacket and tie in the heat of a California November day. When a job offer was made, the idea of no more snow sold me.

## "Transportation Supervisor"

Chester Shurtleff

*The Lab's first truck driver qualified for the job with a pilot's license.*

I was interviewed in July of 1946 at UC Berkeley's Donner Laboratory for the job of truck driver. Because the job had been filled the previous day, I agreed to hire on as a storekeeper for \$185 per month with the understanding that as soon as there was an opening, I would be transferred to truck driver.

The Laboratory was still under the Manhattan Project, so the trucks used were still all Army vehicles. When Mr. Nelson interviewed me, I showed him my Air Force driver's license, which included the license to drive 2 1/2-ton Army trucks. The truth of the matter is that all Air Force flying officers (I was a pilot for single and twin engine) were given such a license as

a precautionary requirement. I had never been in the front seat of an army "W" before. My sole truck-driving experience was in a 3/4-ton pickup as a delivery boy for a grocery store. Nevertheless, I have always laid claim to some mechanical aptitude, and I found after riding with another driver for the day, I could handle that 2 1/2-ton truck as good as he.

My transfer to the Livermore Laboratory became effective on September 1, 1952, although numerous trips were made before that date. This was my first advancement, and I was placed on a monthly pay basis. Because I was the only truck driver and therefore supervised only myself, I decided to name my position "Transportation Supervisor." I had one 4,000-pound forklift, one 1/2-ton pickup, and one Army 2 1/2-ton truck, but that was enough for one man.

## Hot Rod Cadillac

Blake Myers

Ernest Lawrence was a director of Yosemite Park and Energy Company, and one of his perks was a Cadillac at a very low price. On his many trips to Livermore, Lawrence would drive that Cadillac far above the speed limit with the top down, all the while involved in heavy conversations with his passengers, gesturing and turning to those in the front and back seat.



Chester Shurtleff.